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Equal education has traditionally meant free education offering a common curriculum to all children attenting a school in a given locality. However, since the 1954 Supreme Court decision and the Equality of Educational Opportunity survey, implicit assumptions have been challenged by a new concept: equality of opportunity is dependent upon the effects of schooling. At present, educational equality is determined more by the ability of resource inputs to bring about achievement than by the equality of the inputs themselves. This concept implies that the responsibility for achievement rests with the school, not the child. The school might implement this responsibility, particularly for assuring that lower class children learn reading and arithmetic, by contractual arrangements with entrepreneurs outside the school system. This innovation should involve released time plans, private contractors who are paid by results, and free choice for the consumer (parents). Guarantees of racial and social class integration would be built into the contracts. Social integration in large urban school systems can be encouraged by contractual arrangements for interschool activities and programs. (NH)

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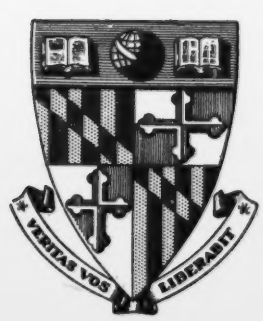

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS

INVITED PAPER

RESPONSIBILITY OF SCHOOLS IN THE PROVISION OF EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

JAMES S. COLEMAN

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RESPONSIBILITY OF SCHOOLS IN THE PROVISION OF EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

James S. Coleman

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I want to focus attention on a general concept or idea, and the way in which that concept, as held by people in society, has changed over recent history and is likely to change in the future. That concept is "equality of educational opportunity."

When public schools began in the United States, the concept of equality of opportunity meant several things:

1. Providing a <u>free education</u> up to a given level which constituted the principal entry point to the labor force.
2. Providing a <u>common curriculum</u> for all children, regardless of background.
3. Partly by design and partly because of low population density, providing that children from diverse backgrounds attend the <u>same school</u>.
4. Providing equality within a given <u>locality</u>, since local taxes provided the source of support for schools.

This conception of equality of opportunity is that which is still held by many persons; but there are some assumptions in it which are not obvious.

One of the most important of these is that opportunity lay in exposure to a given curriculum. The amount of opportunity is then measured in terms of the level of curriculum to which the child is exposed. The higher the curriculum made available to a given set of children, the greater their opportunity.

The most interesting point about this assumption is the relatively passive role of the school and community, relative to the child's role. The school's obligation was to "provide an opportunity" by being available, within easy geographic access of the child, free of cost (beyond the value of the child's time), and with a curriculum that would not exclude him from higher education. The obligation to "use the opportunity" was on the child or the family, so that his role was defined to be the active one, with the responsibility for achievement upon him.

This concept of equality of educational opportunity is one that has been implicit in most educational practice throughout most of the period of public education in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, there have been several challenges to it, serious questions raised by new conditions in public education.

Two of the most important of these came as a result of challenges to the basic concept from opposing directions: The Southern states in the United States, in the face of Negro demands for equality of opportunity during the reconstruction period, devised the concept of "separate but equal." And the Supreme Court countered this in 1954 with the doctrine that legal separation by race inherently constitutes inequality of opportunity. Thus the Southern states challenged assumption 3 of the original concept, the assumption that equality depended on the opportunity to attend the same school. This challenge

was, however, consistent with the overall logic of the original concept, for the idea of attendance at the same school was not the most essential part of the logic. The logic, or inherent idea, was that opportunity resided in exposure to a curriculum, and the community's responsibility was to provide that exposure, the child's to take advantage of it.

It was the pervasiveness of this underlying idea which created the difficulty for the Supreme Court. It was evident that even when identical facilities and identical teacher salaries existed for racially separate schools, "equality of educational opportunity" in some sense did not exist. But the source of this inequality remained an unarticulated feeling. In the decision of the Supreme Court, this unarticulated feeling began to take form. The essence of it was that the effects of such separate schools were, or were likely to be, different. Thus the concept of equality of opportunity which focussed on effects of schooling began to take form. The actual decision of the court was in fact a confusion of two unrelated premises: this new concept, which looked at results of schooling, and the legal premise that the use of race as a basis for school assignment violates fundamental freedoms. But what is important for the evolution of this concept of equality of opportunity is that a new and different assumption was introduced - the assumption that equality of opportunity depends in some fashion upon effects of schooling. By so doing it brought into the open the implicit goals of equality of

educational opportunity - that is, goals having to do with the results of school - to which the original concept was somewhat awkwardly directed. That these goals were in fact behind the concept can be verified by a simple mental experiment: suppose the early schools had operated for only one hour a week, attended by children of all social classes. This would have met the explicit assumptions of the early concept of equality of opportunity, since the school is free, with a common curriculum, and attended by all children in the locality. But it obviously would not have been accepted, even at that time, as providing equality of opportunity, because its effects would have been so minimal. The additional educational resources provided by middle and upper class families, whether in the home, by tutoring, or in private supplementary schools, would have created severe inequalities in results.

Thus the dependence of the concept upon results or effects of schooling, which had lain hidden until 1954, came partially into the open with the Supreme Court decision. Yet this was not the end, for it created more problems than it solved. It might allow one to assess gross inequalities, such as that created by dual school systems in the South, or by a system like that in the mental experiment I just described. But it allows nothing beyond that. Even more confounding, since the decision did not use effects of schooling as a criterion of inequality, but only as justification for a criterion of racial integration, then integration itself emerged as the basis for still a new concept of equality of educational opportunity. Thus the idea of effects of

schooling as an element in the concept was introduced, but immediately overshadowed by another, the criterion of racial integration.

The next stage in the evolution of this concept was, I believe, the Office of Education Survey of Equality of Educational Opportunity. This survey was carried out under a directive in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to the Commissioner of Education to assess the "lack of equality of educational opportunity" among racial and other groups in the United States. The evolution of this concept, and the existing disarray which this evolution had created, made the very definition of the task exceedingly difficult. It was obvious that no single concept of equality of educational opportunity existed; and that the survey must give information relevant to a variety of different concepts.

One of these was the traditional concept, with inequality defined in terms of differences of the community's input to the school, such as per pupil expenditure, school plants, libraries, quality of teachers, and other similar quantities. A second definition of inequality lay in the racial composition of the school, following the Supreme Court's decision that segregated schooling is inherently inequal. By the first of these two concepts, the question of inequality through segregation is excluded, while by the second, there is inequality of education within a school system so long as the schools within the system have different racial composition. Yet neither of these definitions give a suggestion of just how relevant any of these factors might be for school

quality. Both are definitions of inequality in terms of resources provided in the school, with no attention to the relevance of these resources for learning. A third and fourth concept take exactly the opposite approach, looking at effects of school. The first of these may be defined in terms of effects of the school for individuals with equal backgrounds and abilities. In this definition, equality of educational opportunity is equality of results, given the same individual input. With such a definition, inequality might come about either from differences in the school inputs or racial composition; but the test lies in the effects of these conditions.

The fourth type of inequality, again based on effects of school, is defined in terms of consequences of the school for individuals of unequal backgrounds and abilities. In this definition, equality of educational opportunity is equality of results given different individual inputs. The most striking examples of inequality of background here would be children from households in which a language other than English, such as Spanish or Navaho, is spoken. Other examples would be low achieving children from homes in which there is a poverty of verbal expression or an absence of experiences which lead to conceptual facility.

Such a definition taken in the extreme would imply that equality of educational opportunity is reached only when the results of schooling (achievement and attitudes) are the same for the average member of racial and ethnic minorities as for the average member of the dominant group. These

four definitions of equality for which the survey was designed split sharply into two groups: The first two concern input resources: first, those brought to the school by the actions of the school administration: facilities, curriculum, teachers; and second, those brought to the school by the other students, in the educational backgrounds which their presence contributed to the school. The last two definitions concern the effects of schooling. When the report emerged, it did not give four different measures of equality, one for each of these definitions; but it did focus sharply on this dichotomy, giving in chapter 2 information on inequalities of input, relevant to the first and second definitions, and also in chapter 3, information on the relation of input to results, relevant to the third and fourth definitions.

Though it is not directly relevant to our discussion here, it is interesting to note the major results of this report. Examining the relation of school inputs to achievement results showed that it is precisely those input characteristics of schools that are most alike for Negroes and whites that are least effective for their achievement. Differences between schools attended by Negroes and those attended by whites were in the following increasing order: least differences, facilities and curriculum; next, teacher quality, and greatest differences, educational backgrounds of fellow students. This is precisely the same order of the effects of these characteristics on achievement of Negro students: facilities and curriculum least effects, teacher quality next, and backgrounds of fellow students, most effects.

By making the dichotomy between inputs and results explicit, and by focussing attention not only on inputs but on results, I suggest the Report brought into the open what had underlay all the ideas of equality of educational opportunity but had remained largely hidden: that the concept implied effective equality of opportunity, that is, equality in those elements that are effective for learning. The reason this had lay half-hidden, obscured by definitions that involve inputs is, I suspect, because educational research has been until recently unprepared to demonstrate what elements are effective. The controversy that has surrounded the Report indicates that such measurement of effects are still subject to sharp disagreement; but the crucial point is that effects of inputs have come to constitute the basis for assessment of school quality (and thus equality of opportunity), rather than the mere definition of particular inputs as being measures of quality (e.g., small classes are better than large, higher-paid teachers are better than lower-paid ones, by definition).

But then, what would full equality of educational opportunity be if there were equality of effects, independent of the child's background? Clearly, achievement of groups that began at a different point should show a convergence, so that even though two population groups begin school with different levels of skills on the average, the average of the group that begins lower moves up to coincide with that of the group that begins higher.

Yet there are serious questions about this definition of equality of opportunity. It implies that over the period of school, there are no other influences, such as the family environment, which affect achievement over the 12 years of school, even though these influences may differ greatly for the two population groups. Concretely, it implies that white family environments, predominantly middle class, and Negro family environments, predominantly lower class, will produce no effects on achievement that would keep these averages apart. Such an assumption seems highly unrealistic, especially in view of the general importance of family background for achievement.

However, if such possibilities are acknowledged, then how far can they go before there is inequality of educational opportunity? Constant difference over school? Increasing differences?

The unanswerability of such questions begins to give a sense of a new concept of equality of educational opportunity - because these questions concern the relative intensity of two sets of influences: those which are alike for the two groups, principally in school, and those which are different, such as those in the home or neighborhood. If the school's influences are not only alike for the two groups, but very strong, relative to the divergent influences, then the two groups will move closer together. If they are very weak, then they will move apart. Or more generally, the relative intensity of the convergent school influences and the divergent out-of-school influences determines the proximity of the educational system to providing equality of

educational opportunity. That is, equality of output is not so much determined by equality of the resource inputs, but by the power of these resources in bringing about achievement.

This, then, I suggest is the place where the concept of equality of educational opportunity presently stands - an evolution that might have been anticipated a century and a half ago when the first such concepts arose, yet one which is very different from the concept as it first developed. This difference is sharpened if we examine a further implication of the current concept as I have described it. In describing the early concept, I indicated that the role of the community, and the educational institution, was a relatively passive one, that of providing a set of free public resources. The responsibility for profitable use of those resources lay with the child and his family. But the evolution of the concept has reversed these roles. The implication of the concept as I have described it above is that the responsibility to create achievement lies with the educational institution, not the child. The difference in achievement at grade 12 between the average Negro and the average white is, in effect, the degree of inequality of opportunity, and the reduction of that inequality is a responsibility of the school. This shift in responsibility follows logically from the shift of the concept of equality of opportunity from school resource inputs to effects of schooling. When that shift came about as it has in the past several years, the school's responsibility shifted from increasing its "quality" and

equalizing the distribution of this "quality" to the quality of its students' achievements. Yet how is this responsibility to be realized? I suggest that it may be realized through a change in the very concept of the school itself, from the agency within which the child is taught, to the agent responsible for seeing that the child learns - a responsibility in which the school's own facilities may play only a part.

The general idea is to conceive of the school very differently from the way we have done in the past - not as a building into which a child vanishes in the morning and from which he emerges in the afternoon, but as a "home base" that carries out teaching functions but which also serves to coordinate his activities, and to perform guidance, testing, and to act as the child's "agent," in ways I will describe.

The essential aims of the elementary school, if the opportunity for further learning is not to be blocked, are the learning of only two things: reading and arithmetic. It is in teaching these basic skills that present schools most often fail for lower class children, and thus handicap them for further learning. Many new methods for teaching these subjects have been developed in recent years; and there is much interest of persons outside the schools in helping to solve the problem; yet the school is trapped by its own organizational weight - innovations cannot be lightly adopted by a massive educational system, and local arrangements that use community resources outside

the school cannot easily be fitted into the school's organization. But if the school's role shifted from that of providing education to one of taking responsibility for the child's learning, many of these problems vanish. Under such a system, the teaching of elementary-level reading and arithmetic would be opened up to entrepreneurs outside the school, under contract with the school system to teach only reading or only arithmetic, and paid on the basis of increased performance by the child on standardized tests. The methods used by such contractors may only be surmised; the successful ones would presumably involve massive restructuring of the verbal or mathematical environment. The methods might range from new methods for teaching numerical problem-solving to locally sponsored tutorial programs or the use of new technological aids such as talking typewriters and computer consoles. The payment-by-results would quickly eliminate the unsuccessful contractors, and the contractors would provide testing grounds for innovations that could subsequently be incorporated into the school.

One important element that this would introduce into schools is the possibility of parental choice. Each parent would have the choice of sending his child to any of the reading or arithmetic programs outside the school, on released time, or leaving him wholly within the school to learn his reading and arithmetic there. The school would find it necessary to compete with the system's external contractors to provide better education, and the parent could, for the first time in education, have the full privileges of consumer's choice. The school's responsibility would be to insure that the contractors

were effective, to inform parents about their range of choice, and in effect to operate as an educational ombudsman.

One simple control would be necessary to insure that this did not lead to resegregation of the school along racial or class lines: no contractor could accept from any one school a higher proportion of whites than existed in that school, nor a higher proportion of students whose parents were above a certain educational level than existed in the school.

This means of opening up the school, through released time, private contractors, payment by results, and free choice for the consumer, could be directly extended to specific core subjects in high school. It should be a potentially profitable activity to the contractor, but with the profitability wholly contingent upon results, so that the incentives of these teachers and educational entrepreneurs are tied wholly to improving a child's achievement beyond the level that would otherwise be expected of him.

The use of released time and private contracts could be diversified in later years of school, so that a potential contractor could apply for a contract in any of a wide range of subjects, some presently taught within the school, but others not. The many post-high school business and technical schools that now exist would be potential contractors, but always with the public school system establishing the criteria for achievement, testing the results, and acting as an agent for the consumer's interests.

It would still remain the case that the child would stay within the school for much of his time; and in those schools that stood up well to the external competition, most children would choose to take all their work in the school. At the same time, some schools might lose most of their teaching functions - if they did not deserve to keep them.

A second major way of opening up the school is directed wholly at the problem of racial and class integration, just as the first is directed wholly at the problem of achievement. The school would be opened up through intensifying the interactions between students who have different home-base schools. To create integrated schools in large urban centers becomes almost impossible; but to bring about social integration through schools is not. Again, the point is to discard the idea of the school as a closed institution, and think of it as a base of operations. Thus, rather than having classes scheduled in the school throughout the year, some classes would be scheduled with children from other schools, sometimes in their own school, sometimes in the other - but deliberately designed to establish continuing relationships between children across racial and social class lines. Certain extra-curricular activities can be organized on a cross-school basis, arranged to fit with the cross-school class schedules. Thus children from different home base schools would not be competing against each other, but would be members of the <u>same</u> team or club. An intensified program of interscholastic activities, including

debates and academic competitions as well as sports events, could achieve the aims of social integration - possibly not as fully as in the best integrated schools, but also possibly even more so - and certainly more so than in many integrated schools.

This second means of opening up the school could in part be accomplished through outside organizations acting as contractors, in somewhat the same way as the reading and mathematics contractors described earlier. Community organizations could design specific cultural enrichment programs or community action programs involving students from several schools of different racial or class composition, with students engaging in such programs by their own or parent's choice. Thus, resources that exist outside the school could come to play an increasing part in education, through contracts with the schools. Some such programs might be community improvement activities, in which white and Negro high school students learn simultaneously to work together and to aid the community. But the essential element in such programs is that they should not be carried out by the school, in which case they would quickly die after the first enthusiasm had gone, but be undertaken by outside groups under contract to the school, and with the free choice of parent or child.

The idea of opening up the school, of conceiving of the home school as a center of operations, while it can aid the two goals of performance and integration described above, is much more than an ad hoc device for accomplishing these goals. It allows the parent what he has never had within the public school

system: a freedom of choice as a consumer, as well as the opportunity to help establish special purpose programs, clinics and centers which can aid his child's education. It allows educational innovations the opportunity to prove themselves, insofar as they can attract and hold students. The contract centers provide the school with a source of innovation as well as a source of competition to measure its own efforts, neither of which it has had in the past. The interschool scheduling and interscholastic academic events widen horizons of both teachers and children, and provide a means of diffusing both the techniques and content of education, a means which is not possible so long as a school is a closed institution.

A still further problem that has always confronted public education, and has become intense in New York recently, is the issue of neighborhood control versus control by the educational bureaucracy. This issue is ordinarily seen as one of legitimacy: how far is it legitimate for parents to exert organized influence over school policies? But the issue need not be seen this way. The public educational system is a monopoly, and such issues of control always arise in monopolies, where consumers lack a free choice. As consumers, they have a legitimate interest in what that monopoly offers them, and can only exercise this interest through organized power. But such issues do <u>not</u> arise where the consumer can implement his interest through the exercise of free choice between competing offerings. Until now, this exercise of choice has only been available

for those who could afford to buy education outside the public schools.

It is especially appropriate and necessary that such an opening up of schools, providing consumer choice and placing the school in the role of agent to aid that choice, occur in a period when the interest of all society has become focused on the schools. The time is past when society as a whole, parents as individuals, and interested groups outside the school were willing to leave the control of education wholly to the public education system, to watch children vanish into the school in the morning and emerge from it in the afternoon, without being able to affect what goes on behind the school doors.